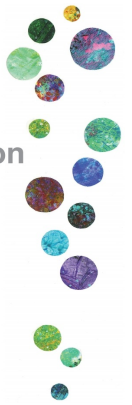


How to choose appropriate professional support



"I would like some professional help, but how do I know if they know anything about giftedness? I have had so many negative experiences.... I really don't ever want to have therapy again."

Unfortunately there are many gifted people who are extremely reluctant due to bad experiences. Previous counselors often never addressed the issue of being gifted. Some may have been decidedly negative about giftedness. There are also a number of gifted people who have had a conflict with a counselor. This leaflet addresses some of the issues that play a part in finding an appropriate counselor for you and gives some recommendations.

Why professional help?

We urge you to seek professional help if you've had problems that you are apparently unable to solve, when you have serious complaints (including physical complaints) and if these problems can have serious consequences on important areas of life, such as work and personal relationships.

Finding professional help is not a sign of weakness. Don't feel ashamed about it. Remember that persevering for a long time without support will not help you and those closest to you and it will not make your problems go away by themselves. The positive side is that you can really advance in life and become a lot happier when you get good support.

Professionals can address cognitive, emotional and physical aspects, or a mix of them. Most gifted people are good at debating; an approach that is not only cognitive can be very enlightening for them.

However, you should remain selective in your search. When asking for professional help you are the 'client' who will consult with the counselor about the details of the process and you will obviously have a major contribution. A standard approach rarely suits gifted people.

What do you focus on when searching?

Type of help: Try to get a clear idea of what you are looking for in advance. For example: developing your strong points, supportive conversations, problem clarification, discussing your experiences and needs, diagnostics, therapy. When complaints may be linked to a psychological or psychiatric issue try to find a psychologist, psychotherapist or psychiatrist. For problem clarification and developing your strong points a coach or counselor can be of great help.

Background and experience of the counselor: First of all it's important that the approach of the counselor would suit you. Ask information about this beforehand. Find out what the qualifications and registrations of the counselor are. If possible, ask around and find out if you know anyone who knows the counselors you are looking into.

Experience with giftedness: If a counselor isn't taking into account the giftedness of the client in diagnosing and treatment, then there is little chance that he/she will do justice to the special characteristics and properties associated with your giftedness and the unique experiences that you have in life because of that. It is especially in the contact with the counselor that your 'being different' is an important issue that deserves attention. It is often essential that the counselor is gifted him/herself, but not always. You are the one who determines this.

Person: Many people prefer a counselor of a specific gender. And age can be important too. Think about what is important to you and be honest about this. The personal connection with the counselor is oftentimes the most important factor for success.

Distance: Sometimes it takes a bit more travel to find a good counselor. This may be worth the investment. And during the trip you can think about what you have been through and/or what you want to discuss. You do need to take into account how much energy the travelling will cost you.

What can you expect? Your problems will not be solved immediately. You need to do many things yourself to make progress. And that takes courage. Depending on the kind of problems you have and the help you get, you can get out of a bad situation, find ways to deal with difficult issues and change the way you look at yourself because of the new insights you have acquired.

Compensation: If you can find someone whose consultations will be reimbursed by your health insurance or your employer, a referral from a doctor is necessary and a diagnosis has to be made based on the DSM (a world-wide agreement on psychological diagnoses). Being gifted is not a diagnosis in the DSM; but secondary complaints are. Don't forget that such a diagnosis will remain in your medical files. Think about this carefully and discuss the pros and cons with your doctor. Sometimes employers will reimburse psychological counseling or coaching. Discuss this with the doctor associated with the company you work for or someone from Human Resources (the IHBV has a leaflet specifically written for occupational health physicians). Sometimes tax deductions are possible. If you need to pay for counseling out of your own pocket, try to see it as investing in yourself.

Practical: Make a list of criteria based on the issues mentioned above and what you want to find in a counselor and write down your questions. We recommend that you contact at least two potential counselors.

Working together with your counselor

Building a good working relationship with a counselor requires commitment from both sides. It's important that you find out what you need in the relationship and that you raise any issues you have whenever necessary.

If you have had negative experiences with counselors in the past, then it's good to discuss these. It will help the counselor understand your reactions and can help you gain trust in this counselor.

Will you talk about your being gifted, or thinking that maybe you are gifted? Weigh the pros and cons of this. If your counselor has experience with the subject, then you can mention it and talk about it. In other cases it's good to start by talking about your specific characteristics.

When the first session isn't what you expected, then be honest about it. It's a lot harder to change counselors when you are in the middle of a treatment. In any case, try to avoid getting in a power struggle with your counselor, and use any possible obstacles you encounter to learn from for the future.

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